

Clarifications and Distinctions

Florida-Bahamas Synod Parish Deacons/ELCA Rostered Deacon

As of: January 1, 2017

In a vote by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August, 2016, the three Word and Service rosters (Associates in Ministry, Deaconess, and Diaconal Minister) will be merged to form one unified roster of Word and Service ministry. As of January 1, 2017, all rostered ministers of Word and Service (Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses, Diaconal Ministers) will officially be transitioned to this new roster, which will be called 'Deacon.' For several reasons, this is a positive move for the church:

1. A unified roster of Word and Service Ministry will clarify the confusion caused by the three previous rosters—different in title and training, but similar in expression and ministry;
2. A unified roster of Deacons will lead to greater consistency in training, formation, and call process for Word and Service ministers. Instead of 3 different training and formation processes, there will be a unified process for all Word and Service ministers;
3. A unified roster of Deacons will strengthen the ELCA's connection with ecumenical partners who more easily understand, and also use, the titles of bishops, pastors and deacons for public leaders;
4. A unified roster of Deacons will reclaim the historical and theological role of the diaconate as the ministry of those called specifically to proclamation of Word and intentional and active leadership of service ministry in the congregation and the community. In a document created by the ELCA Word and Service Task Force, Bishop Bill Gafjken (Indiana-Kentucky) said this about the role of the deacon: "Whatever their particular role or context – whether deeply engaged in proclamation and service in non-ecclesial contexts or serving in congregational or other "church" settings – every deacon of the ELCA has a two-fold focus to serve the neighbor and to empower, equip and encourage the people of God for their daily baptismal vocation of service to the neighbor and care of creation."
http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Deacon_Descriptions.pdf?_ga=1.94742804.904321137.1464026388

For the Florida-Bahamas synod, where there is a thriving ministry of Synod Deacons, this unified roster provides this synod with an opportunity to lift up the variety of ways "we are church together" as we clarify the unique role of the synod deacon as compared to the rostered deacon, while preserving the distinctiveness of each without confusing them.

This document seeks to articulate the distinctiveness of the Synod Deacon and the Rostered Deacon, answer some questions about things that will change or adjust to clarify some confusion, and identify how we will continue to lift up both rostered deacons and synod deacons in this synod.

How will we tell the difference between rostered deacons and synod deacons?

Ministers of Word and Service will be called "Deacon"—both male and female—and may choose to be addressed by the title "Deacon." Deacons who are also in the ELCA Deaconess Community may still be called "Deaconess" and be addressed by the title "Sister [Name]." Deacons who are also members of the Lutheran Deaconess Association may be addressed by the title "Deaconess [name]." Ministers of Word and Service will be specifically called "ELCA Deacons." This acknowledges that the deacon is rostered in the ELCA.

Synod Deacons will be called “Synod Parish Deacons,” which will speak more specifically to the context of their ministry. “Synod” references that they have been certified and approved by the Synod Deacon Oversight Committee. “Parish” references that the context of their call is their local congregation and community, under the authority of a pastor. “Deacon” references the function of their ministry—that of the diaconate serving the community, assisting in worship, and proclaiming the Word. In his/her local congregation, a Synod Parish Deacon may be addressed as “Deacon [name].”

How is a Rostered ELCA Deacon (Minister of Word and Service) different than a Synod Parish Deacon?

Rostered ministers have specific theological and professional training that equip them for their work in ministry. This work may be within a congregation, synod office, church organization or community organization. Their call is most often a paid position. Rostered ministers are approved by their synod candidacy committee for public ministry, are accountable to their bishop, and are called to the whole church. They are issued a letter of call and are called to specific locations and ministry settings. They are to be open to call and responsive to the needs of the whole church.

A Synod Parish Deacon is approved by the bishop of the synod to serve a local congregation at the authority of the pastor. Their ministry is volunteer ministry, focused in their local context. The Deacon Oversight Committee, under the direction of the synod bishop, screens all candidates, maintains a unified set of standards for Synod Parish Deacons and maintains the list of approved Synod Parish Deacons. When a pastor leaves his/her call, or for any reason chooses not to have a Synod Parish Deacon, a Synod Parish Deacon steps down from the role of deacon until the next pastor re-appoints them if he/she so desires.

What will the Rite of Entry be?

ELCA Deacons will be CONSECRATED after their approval for public ministry and upon receiving a call. Synod Parish Deacons will be COMMISSIONED. The current Rite of Consecration for Synod Parish Deacons will be modified to reflect this change, and will speak more specifically to the role of the deacon in the local parish/community. If/when a new pastor re-instates a Synod Parish Deacon, the Synod Parish Deacon will not need to be re-commissioned. A service of re-instatement and prayer will be developed for this situation.

Will Synod Parish Deacons still wear stoles?

Vestments in worship have to do with the function the person is filling. A pastor wears different vestments depending on what that pastor is doing in the service (chasuble vs. stole only, etc.). Similarly, the diagonal (“deacon’s”) stole speaks to the function of the person wearing it.

- When a Synod Parish Deacon is serving the function of a deacon in worship in their local congregation where they serve (assisting minister, setting the Table, reading scripture and prayers, etc), they may wear a deacon’s stole.
- When a Synod Parish Deacon is serving the function of deacon (in the role of presiding assisting minister, for example) at a synod worship event (Synod Assembly, Bishop’s visitation, conference worship event, etc), they may wear their stole.
- When a Synod Parish Deacon is attending the commissioning of a new Synod Parish Deacon, they may wear their stole.

- When Synod Parish Deacons gather together at the Deacons retreat and are serving in worship, they may wear their stole.

When are Synod Parish Deacons not to wear stoles?

- Synod Parish Deacons are not to wear their stoles at the graduation ceremony for **diakonia**. While the **diakonia program** is the training that many Synod Parish Deacons have completed, graduating from **diakonia** is not a commissioning to serve as a Synod Parish Deacon, it is a synodwide event observing the completion of the **diakonia** program. Except as described above, Synod Parish Deacons will no longer wear stoles outside of the congregation in which they have been commissioned to serve. If a Synod Parish Deacon is assisting in worship at the **diakonia** graduation, but it is not his/her home congregation, a stole is not to be worn.

- At other synod events (Ordination/Installation of pastors, Consecration/Installation of ELCA Deacons), Synod Parish Deacons may wear albs and be part of the procession, but may not wear stoles. If they have special crosses that symbolize their role as deacon, they may wear those.